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ABSTRACT

This document contains three papers on integrating university and corporate learning with work. "Workplace Application of HRD Concepts as Perceived by Non-Traditional Adult Students and Their Workplace Supervisors" (Kit Brooks, Dale E. Thompson, Elizabeth S. Lizarraga) reports on a study in which nontraditional students enrolled in an accelerated undergraduate HRD degree program and their workplace supervisors were interviewed to determine the extent to which the students applied the skills and concepts they learned in their HRD program to their workplaces. "Tactical Management of Power: The Practical Work of Negotiating Stakeholder Interests in Planning Education Programs in a Corporate Context" (Christie Knittel Mabry, Arthur L. Wilson) discusses a descriptive qualitative study of how adult educators who are planning education programs in a multinational corporation context negotiate stakeholder power and interests. "Understanding the Experience of College Graduates during Their First Year of Employment" (Janet L. Polach) discusses the nine themes that were identified during a study of the experiences of eight college graduates who had just completed their first year of employment by a major midwestern manufacturer. All three papers include substantial bibliographies. (MN)

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Brooks/Mabry/Poketch

Symposium 2

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Workplace Application of HRD Concepts as Perceived by Non-Traditional Adult Students and their Workplace Supervisors

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This study examines non-traditional students' transfer concepts taught in an accelerated undergraduate HRD degree program. It focused on students' application of learned skills and concepts. Students and their workplace supervisors were interviewed over the telephone regarding the evidence of application of learning within the workplace. Results seemed to substantiate the application of skills and concepts learned in the HRD program was transferred to the workplace, and the organization and the individual benefited by the skills and concepts learned.

Keywords: Transfer, Evaluation, Qualitative

This study explores student and supervisor perceptions of application within the workplace of skills and concepts learned in an accelerated undergraduate Human Resource Development (HRD) degree program. In 1999, a total of 62.5 billion dollars was spent on training in the U.S. (Training, 1999). Recent studies suggest that actual transfer of new skills and knowledge back to the job as a result of training ranges from10 to 30% (Brinkerhoff & Gill, 1994; Brinkerhoff & Montesino, 1995; Tannenbaum & Yulk, 1992; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Broad & Newstrom, 1992). "The focus on performance and its requirement for transfer of learning, means that a shift in perspective is necessary..." (Phillips & Broad, 1997, p.3). This shift in perspective has resulted in top managers demanding evidence that their training investment has paid off or contributed to increased performance outcomes.

Transfer of Learning

"Transfer of learning is the effective and continuing application by learners – to their performance of jobs or other individual, organizational, or community responsibilities-of knowledge and skills gained in learning activities " (Phillips & Broad, 1997, p.2). Baldwin & Ford (1988) suggest that transfer requires learned behavior to be generalized to the job context and maintained over a period of time. Factors that affect the learning outcomes include design of learning program, characteristics of the learner, and work- environment characteristics. Figure 1 illustrates Baldwin and Fords model of the transfer process (1988).

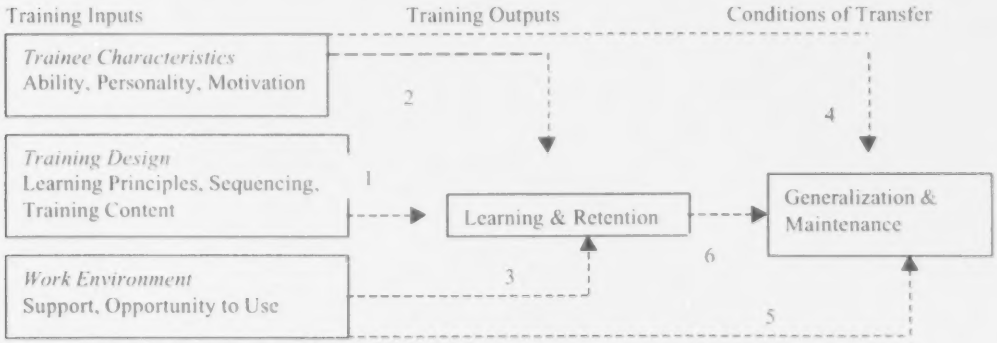

Figure 1: Baldwin & Ford's Model of the Transfer Process

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The *application* of skills learned through training and education and its impact on workplace performance is important to consider given the vast amount of dollars invested in these interventions and the performance expectations associated with training and education. The incorporation of learning principles, the sequencing of learning material, and job relevance of learning content are the learning input factors that affect the learning outcomes. Work-environment characteristics that affect learning outcomes include supervisory or peer support as well as constraints and opportunities to perform learned behaviors on the job. Learner characteristics that influence learning outcomes include ability, personality, and motivation.

Evaluation of Learning

Evaluation is a method of gathering data to determine if learning activities have value (Broad, 1997). Kirkpatrick's (1994) model measures the value of four separate learning domains. The four levels or domains include: (a) Level I – Reaction: measures how learners feel about learning/training, (b) Level II – Learning: evaluates what was learned and retained from the learning experience, (c) Level III – Behavior /Application: evaluates the degree to which learners apply what was learned on the job, and (d) Level IV – Results: evaluates the impact that transfer of learning has on the business.

Phillips and Broad (1997) suggest that while providers of learning have typically evaluated participants' reaction to learning, fewer have measured the knowledge and skill gains at the end of the learning event. This practice of low-level evaluation has contributed to the scramble for these providers to find evidence of transfer of learning and improved performance in the current management climate of improving performance while cutting costs and demonstrating return-on-investment (Phillips & Board, 1997).

This focus on performance improvement can be traced in part to the dismal results that business and industry have garnered from the exorbitant amount of money that was allocated in training over the past decade. According to Dixon (1992), three factors are driving organizations to become more productive and intensify the organizational emphasis on learning. These forces include the changing nature of work, the competitive challenges associated with the global economy, and the increasing pace and unpredictable nature of change. Zuboff (1988) posits that information technology has altered the basic assumptions regarding work and learning.

> The informed organization is a learning institution, and one of its principal purposes is the expansion of knowledge-not knowledge for its own sake (as in academic pursuit), but knowledge that comes to reside at the core of what it means to be productive. Learning is no longer a separate activity that occurs either before one enters the workplace or in remote classroom settings. Nor is it an activity preserved for managerial groups. The behaviors that define learning and the behaviors that define being productive are one and the same. Learning is not something that requires time out from being engaged in productive activity; learning is the heart of productivity. To put it simply, learning is the new form of labor (p. 395).

The emphasis on evaluating results of learning has strong implications for HRD professionals who by the nature of their positions are typically charged with managing learning within organizations.

Background

A baccalaureate degree in vocational education with a major in Human Resource Development for adults in the workforce was developed at the College of Education, University of Arkansas, in the Department of Vocational and Adult Education. Requiring 125 credit hours, the program allows students with significant workplace experience to receive up to 33 credit hours for experiential learning. HRD courses and internships provide the upper division courses required for degree completion. Students must meet the 56-hour general studies requirements of the University, courses that can be taken in a two-year postsecondary setting. Credit granted through documented prior work is accomplished through composite-portfolio documentation following a standardized format and Academic Standards as suggested by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL). Applicants will be required to develop a composite-portfolio through which they petition for and are awarded academic credit toward an undergraduate degree in Vocational Education.

Courses include (a) skills and strategies in professional development, (b) strategic planning and development, (c) leadership, (d) team building, (e) research and evaluation, (f) communication, (g) adult learning, and (h) skills in instruction and facilitation.

The HRD program component was introduced in Fall 1996 and was offered to a group of approximately 40 students via compressed video distance education at four sites on Friday evenings and Saturdays. The courses were offered in an accelerated format, meeting 9 weeks instead of the standard 15 weeks. Currently, there are five different groups of students involved in the program at nine different sites throughout the state.

Purpose of the Study

Spender (1992) posits that firms are engaged in two processes: knowledge creation and knowledge application. Demsetz's (1991) suggests that the efficiency in the acquisition of knowledge requires that individuals specialize in specific areas of knowledge, while application of knowledge to produce good and services requires the bringing together of many areas of specialized knowledge. Reich (1987) posits that the learning process is central to continuous organizational improvement and enhanced performance and that all learning in an organization must necessarily occur though individuals. This study proposes to move beyond the traditional Level III evaluation of student application of learned HRD concepts. The purpose of this study is to explore student and supervisor perceptions regarding application within the workplace of skills and concepts learned in the HRD program. The research design is focused on identifying the Level IV impact upon their organizations.

Methods

This study used qualitative methods as the primary research design. A fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is its in-depth exploration of a phenomenon and its context (Densin & Lincoln, 1994; Fryer, 1991; Patton, 1990). Telephone interviews were conducted with each student and their workplace supervisor from the sample. A structured, open-ended interview guide was used for each telephone interview. The interview guide consisted of questions that explored student and supervisor perceptions regarding application of concepts and skills learned in the HRD program. Interview questions included:

Student Interview Guide

1. The concepts / skills that were taught in the HRD program included: communication, leadership, principles of adult learning, instruction and facilitation, needs assessment / research, team building, and professional development. Describe how have you applied the concepts that were presented in the HRD program.
2. How has your organization benefited by your participation in the HRD program?
3. How has the HRD program benefited you personally?
4. How has the HRD program benefited you professionally?

Supervisor Interview Guide

1. The concepts / skills that were taught in the HRD program included: communication, leadership, principles of adult learning, instruction and facilitation, needs assessment / research, team building, and professional development. Describe how [name of student] has applied these concepts on the job.
2. How has your organization benefited by [name of student] participation in the HRD program?
3. How has the HRD program benefited [name of student] personally?
4. How has the HRD program benefited [name of student] professionally?

Both student and supervisor interviews were tape recorded with participant consent. Numerical codes were assigned to each interview to protect anonymity of the participants during data analysis. All interviews were subsequently transcribed and analyzed using a computer-based qualitative data analysis program. Because this was a descriptive and exploratory study, the data were analyzed for patterns.

In accordance with qualitative methods, research participants were selected using purposeful sampling. Patton (1990) suggested that the power of purposeful sampling methodology is selecting information-rich cases for the purpose of learning a great deal about issues of central importance to the research. Criterion-based purposeful sampling was used to select individual participants. To be included in the study, the participants had to meet the following requirements: (a) student participants were from the first and second program cohort, (b) student participants had completed all the HRD courses, (c) student participants had the same workplace supervisor throughout the program, (d) student participants consented to be interviewed, and (e) students consented to having their supervisor interviewed. Workplace supervisors were selected if (a) they consented to participate in the interview, and (b) if they had supervised a student throughout the program. Eighteen students and their supervisors met all of the criteria. Participants represented the following fields: banking, health care, manufacturing, public utilities, and post-secondary education. Participants represented both supervisory and non-supervisory positions.

Data Analysis

Because the primary focus of this study is the application of concepts and skills that were transferred from classroom to workplace, participants' responses were analyzed and subsequently coded to identify patterns in the data that described evidence of knowledge transfer. HRD course concepts and skills focused on communication, needs assessment, leadership, professional development, adult learning principles, instruction and facilitation. Data from each interview were coded to identify evidence of application in the workplace of these skills and concepts. Each student and supervisor response has been coded to provide an audit trail that describes the context of the comments. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe an audit trail as a method of logging and describing our procedures and data clearly enough so that others can understand them, reconstruct them, and scrutinize them. The trustworthiness of the study is contingent upon the audit trail being (a) complete, (b) comprehensible, and (c) systematically related to methodological approaches (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

In this study students and their supervisors were asked to indicate how skills learned in the HRD program were applied within their workplace. This section summarizes the participants' descriptions and examples of the transfer of skills and concepts from the classroom to the workplace. The skills and concepts described by participants include communication, leadership, adult learning principles, instruction and facilitation, evaluation/research, teambuilding, and professional development

Application of Communication Skills

Students reported that their improved speaking skills had significant impact within their workplace. They reported being more comfortable speaking in front of groups. Due to their improved listening skills, they indicated an increased ability to understand co-workers and their problems. This enabled them to respond more appropriately to what was communicated by others. The students also reported that their non-verbal skills had been developed during the program. This has also improved their ability to better "read" people and respond appropriately. Generally, students reported that being more focused on the communication process and using the skills and strategies presented in the HRD program has increased their effectiveness at work.

The supervisors indicated that the students that had completed that HRD program exhibited increased confidence when communicating to co-workers and clients, and a better understanding of communication methods, and increased ease and ability to disseminate information throughout the organization.

Application of Leadership and Teambuilding Skills

Students perceived that they were better managers because their "people skills" had improved. This was described as being able to provide a more productive environment for their co-workers due to the skills learned in the leadership HRD program.

Supervisors described leadership changes that included improved organization skills, the ability to motivate, lead teams, and delegate tasks. They also observed improvement in decision making, coordinating others, planning and facilitating meetings, and mentoring others.

Application of Adult Learning Principles

Students reported applying principles of adult learning in various ways. Examples of these applications included using professional presentation methods when delivering information to co-workers and clients. Students commented on using the techniques that facilitate learning during staff and company meetings and when dealing with external clients. Students indicated that understanding the different learning styles impacted formal and informal communication processes.

Supervisors indicated that students had gained the ability to establish / revise internal training programs that reflected effective adult learning principles. Students not only managed the training programs, but also expanded their roles as facilitators. Supervisors also reported that students demonstrated the relevance of adult learning theory to functional management skills.

Application of Facilitation and Instruction Skills

Many students reported using facilitation and instruction skills learned in the HRD program by assessing and altering their current training programs and developing new programs. Some students developed curriculum and manuals to facilitate learning. Others altered the employee evaluation process within their workplaces.

Supervisors commented on the students' ability to suggest and design alternative training programs while streamlining various processes. They also commented on students' ability to identify resources to facilitate workplace learning.

Application of Research and Evaluation Skills

Students felt that their increased research and evaluation skills helped them assess various organizational needs and design effective methods to evaluate the success of programs implemented to address the identified needs.

Supervisors indicated that students made databased suggestions and decisions regarding organizational policies and procedures. Examples of this included designing performance-based job descriptions and multi-rater evaluation processes.

Application of Professional Development Concepts

Students reported that they continue to assess themselves and their competencies as their roles change within the workplace. Many continue pursuing formal and informal professional development activities in order to reach their professional demands and goals. Many reported routinely reading professional journals and participating in professional associations as a means of continuous self-improvement.

Supervisors indicated increased professionalism among the students from the HRD program, as well as the ability to identify and locate appropriate professional resources that benefited the organization.

Limitations of the Study

This study contributes to the knowledge base in HRD by demonstrating that multiple perspectives can provide powerful data regarding a phenomenon under investigation. This methodology allows the researcher to validate and contrast diverse perspectives regarding identical concepts. And finally, it goes beyond program evaluation that examines singular perspectives at the reaction level. While the results of the research are significant, the study's limitations should be considered. Specifically, this study relied primarily on self-reported information. There was no observation of reported information that would further strengthen the data.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

Aside from affirming that transfer of learning from the classroom to the workplace did occur, the underlying theme that emerged from this study seemed to suggest that the individual and the organization benefited by this ability to transfer knowledge and skills from the learning environment back to the working environment. While both supervisors and students responded to specific questions, they indicated that students were better employees as a result of attending the HRD program. Students reported feeling more qualified and confident while supervisors reported observing enhanced leadership qualities among students.

This study indicates that not only did transfer of knowledge occur, but also the application of the knowledge required synthesis of different types of knowledge. It reasonable to assume that there is a causal linkage between learning, transfer, and individual and organizational benefit. The results of this study indicates that students developed cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively as a result of learning HRD concepts and then applying these skills to the workplace.

While students and supervisors often used different words and examples to describe their perceptions of how learning transferred and was applied within the workplace, patterns across the data from both populations confirm that transfer of learning did occur. However, there is a need for further study to better understand the relationship between learning and transfer. For example, we did not investigate the conditions that the literature indicates affect transfer of learning within the workplace, nor did we examine the factors associated with the learning environment of the HRD program that may have affected transfer. A study that examines various types of support and opportunities for students to try out their newly learned skills is indicated. It would also be interesting to explore the motivational aspects of transfer of learning as well as the cognitive and environmental factors that

influence this phenomenon. Exploring the impact of the methods used to teach coursework in the HRD program and socialization processes would also be advisable.

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Tactical Management of Power: The Practical Work of Negotiating Stakeholder Interests in Planning Education Programs in a Corporate Context

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The purpose of this study was to investigate how adult educators negotiate power and interests in program planning for training and development in a corporate setting. The research methodology was a descriptive qualitative study of typical program planning practices of adult educators in a multi-national corporation. The chief finding was that planners' "practical" strategic action for negotiating interests and power varied according to specific situations and how planners perceived the involvement of various stakeholders.

Keywords: Power, Negotiation, Stakeholders

Problem Statement

Much of the educational program planning literature proposes an ideal, rational model for how educational programs should get planned in organizations (e.g., Apps, 1979; Boone, 1985; Boyle, 1981; Brinkerhoff & Gill, 1994; Broad & Newstrom, 1992; Knowles, 1980; Sork & Buskey, 1986; Sork & Caffarella, 1989). Research has demonstrated, however, that the actual practice of planning and implementing educational programs differs significantly from these rational models (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 1996, 1998; Sork, 1996, 2000).

Indeed, education planning in business and industry always occurs in specific settings – settings which are marked by a variety of stakeholder needs and interests as well as organizational opportunities and restraints. To this end, Cervero and Wilson (1994, 1996, and 1998) contend that planning is essentially a social and political activity in which people negotiate with each other to determine the eventual output of an education program. They write that "putting practice into its social context inextricably links planners' actions to the complex world of power relationships and interests" (1994, p. 28).

As a result, research in the past decade has begun to focus attention on what Sork (1996, 2000) refers to as the socio-political and ethical dimensions of program planning. Cervero and Wilson (1994, 1996, & 1998) argue that program planning must be understood as a social activity in which adult educators negotiate personal and organizational interests within relationships of power. Their research has demonstrated that stakeholder interests are causally related to which programs get planned. A number of investigations have demonstrated the centrality of negotiating power and interests in educational program planning (e.g., Mills, Cervero, Langone, & Wilson, 1995; Rees, Cervero, Moshi, & Wilson, 1997; Sessions & Cervero, 1999). From this work we can say with some confidence that we know *what* adult educators do.

Although the case studies in Cervero and Wilson (1994, 1996) and other studies offer some important insights, we know relatively less, however, about *how* HRD practitioners actually negotiate multiple and often conflicting interests in practice. Therein lies the problem that is central to this study – to uncover the specific tactics that HRD practitioners use to manage power in order to negotiate stakeholder interests in the highly political organizational terrains in which they work.

Theoretical Framework

Much of the discussion in adult as well as business education program planning literature has focused on the technical aspects of program planning (e.g., Apps, 1979; Boone, 1985; Boyle, 1981; Brinkerhoff & Gill, 1994; Broad & Newstrom, 1992;Knowles, 1980; Sork & Buskey, 1986; Sork & Caffarella, 1989) to the detriment of the

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context oriented or socio-political aspects. Indeed, the literature on negotiation has long been heavily prescriptive with little empirical evidence to show how people actually negotiate in practice. Forester (1999) and Lax and Sebenius (1986) straddle both the prescriptive and the empirical as they offer up their own views about what negotiation should look like ideally, along with evidence of how it occurs in practice. Elgstrom and Riis (1992) offer another way to understand negotiation through their discussion of substantive and meta-negotiations. Cervero and Wilson's (1998) and Umble's (1998) empirical analyses of the substantive and meta-negotiations that occurred in several case studies add strength to this perspective.

Yang's (1996) extensive analysis of the literature on power and interests lends yet another dimension to understanding negotiation. Yang (1996) and Yang, Cervero, Valentine, and Benson (1998) developed a model to help understand how planners negotiate power and interests in program planning for adult education. In developing the Power and Influence Tactics Scale (POINTS), Yang outlines seven general strategies: 1) reasoning; 2) consulting; 3) appealing; 4) networking; 5) bargaining; 6) pressuring; and 7) counteracting. Yang's analysis has helped to move the conversation from what planners do (negotiate) to the important strategic question of how they negotiate. Even with these broad strategic categories, however, we know comparatively less about how planners actually use negotiating tactics in practice.

Giddens' (1979) notion of the differences between practical and discursive consciousness proved helpful in exploring the practical terrain of actual planning. Discursive consciousness refers to the mode of cognition in which social actors are able to explicitly detail knowledge about the social systems in which they participate. This is the type of knowledge revealed by Yang's POINTS inventory. Practical consciousness, which Giddens defines as the "tacit stocks of knowledge which actors draw upon in the constitution of social activity" (p. 5), is the mode in which actors adeptly navigate their worlds on a daily basis but are, nonetheless, typically less able to articulate. That is, they are effectively able to draw upon such tacit stocks of knowledge and practice without being able to say how they do it. Following on Giddens, it is our contention that much significant, but as of yet unarticulated, knowledge about planning exists at this level of cognition.

To this end, the research has shown the following. First, program planning in adult education is an inherently political process (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 1996, 1997 & 1998; Forester, 1989 & 1999; Sork, 1996 & 2000). Second, and because of this, planners negotiate power and interests as they manage the political landscapes in which they work (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 1996, 1997 & 1998; Forester, 1989 & 1999). Third, planners negotiate power and interests through simultaneously employing both substantive (where they act within the web of existing power relations to construct the program's purpose) and meta-negotiations (where they act on the power relations themselves – thereby either strengthening or weakening those macro-level boundaries) (Cervero & Wilson, 1998; Elgstrom & Riis, 1992; Umble, 1998; Sork, 1996). Fourth, and based on Yang's (1996 & 1998) work, we have a better understanding of what these tactics look like. *How* such tactics (and others) are actually employed while negotiating power and interests in planning practice was the focus of this study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate *how* adult educators negotiate power and interests in program planning for training and development in a corporate setting. This study is significant because it sought to investigate what successful program planners actually know and do by examining the actual tactics and strategies used by HRD practitioners. Understanding the practical negotiation strategies employed by adult educators could be instrumental in improving program planning practice.

Methodology

The research methodology was a descriptive qualitative study of typical program planning practices of adult educators in a large, multi-national corporation which is referred to as the Warde Financial Corporation. A qualitative methodology was selected for three key reasons. The first was that the purpose of this study was to describe and analyze the social processes of program planning practice. Qualitative analyses are considered to be especially well suited for investigations of social phenomena that are descriptive, interpretive, or analytical (Yin, 1994). Second was the exploratory nature of this research. The prime author and lead researcher for this study, Christie Mabry, was not only concerned with *what* planners do in negotiating power and interests, but *how* and why they do it. Thus, these kinds of questions were best understood through thick descriptions and inductive analysis. The third reason was because of the "bounded" nature of this particular system. A bounded system is any particular system – be it an individual, an event, a situation, a program, or a phenomenon – over which the researcher has little or no control, and which is not easily separated from its context. Thus, the specific negotiation strategies of adult

educators in the "Warde Corporation" are context specific, and hence idiosyncratic, to this company (Mills, 1993; Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

To this end, this study was what Merriam and Simpson (1995) call a combination of a descriptive and an interpretive qualitative study. The researchers sought to develop categories to conceptually illustrate, support, or to challenge theoretical assumptions. In doing so, the intention was to get a better understanding of the largely tacit and practical strategies that occur along this socio-political dimension.

The specific units of analysis were fourteen adult educators who worked in sites that spanned the boundaries of three different Warde Financial Corporation companies. The rationale behind this proposed selection of multiple sites within the Warde "system" was to partially account for the diversity of contexts that could be found within the different divisions within the greater Warde Financial Corporation. It was important to attempt to achieve some measure of context diversity to more closely replicate a "typical" sample of program planning practice.

Nonprobabilistic, or purposeful, was the sampling methodology utilized in this study [got a reference for this?]. More specifically, a typical case sample was the type of purposeful sampling employed in this study. Typical case purposeful samples reflect typical people in typical planning phenomena. As such, the selection criteria for adult educators for this study included the following characteristics: adult educators who possessed a minimum of three years experience in planning programs for adult education; adult educators who possessed a minimum of two years of experience with the Warde Financial Corporation; adult educators who represented varying sizes of Warde Financial Corporation businesses; adult educators who represented the Warde Financial Corporation Corporate office; adult educators who were located in differing geographic areas and field office locations; adult educators who had planned a new or major program within the last twelve months, or who were in the process of planning a new or major program.

Specifically, these sampling criteria ensured that the adult educators who were studied had a history of program planning experience from which to call upon and experience negotiating the organizational context at the Warde Financial Corporation. It was also very important that various Warde Financial Corporation businesses/sites were studied to account for some of the distinct differences that existed based on company size, geographic location, the nature of the specific business-type, leadership philosophy and practice, corporate culture, and field versus home office dynamics. Finally, it was important that the researcher was relatively unfamiliar with the particular business dynamics (the specific people, micro-politics, etc.) present in each of the businesses studied.

This study was set up such that the researcher would have multiple contacts with each subject. These contacts included a twenty to thirty minute preliminary telephone conversation, a one and a half-hour in-depth face-to-face interview, and a follow-up telephone call to clarify any questions or issues which emerged during the analysis of the data.

Of this group of fourteen adult educators, three were Directors of Education at their sites, and had somewhat different perspectives based upon their vantage points as education leaders. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) would describe these three directors as key informants. The other eleven subjects were staff trainers and program managers. As such, program planning for adult education comprised a huge percentage of their daily jobs. Indeed, in that most of them were individual contributors in the organization (i.e., they did not manage other people), their success in program planning rested on their abilities to demonstrate considerable negotiation skills in organizations where they did not possess a lot of positional power. As such, they provided a very compelling perspective on negotiations strategies that were utilized in practice.

In addition to the multiple contacts with these two levels of adult educators at three different sites, critical incident technique was also employed (Brookfield, 1986). The participants completed and returned a one to two page critical incident piece where they reflected upon a program that was particularly meaningful to them as an either extraordinarily positive or negative experience in program planning. This incident then, formed the basis of the one and a half-hour face-to-face discussion.

In addition, document analysis was employed as another way to gain methodological plurality. The documents reviewed included plans of work, project reports, memos and correspondence, notes, program files, organizational charts, program materials, and any other program-related information that might have proven helpful in understanding both the program planning process as well as the program planning goals vis-à-vis the end results.

Triangulation, as defined by Mathison (1988) as the attempt to aid in the construction of plausible explanations and fuller understandings of the phenomena being studied, was achieved by utilizing more than one data source, by pursuing multiple contacts, through use of the critical incident technique, and through document analysis.

Data analysis incorporated the constant comparative method as well as content analysis. Content analysis was employed in examining the field notes, program planning documents, correspondence, notes, memorandums,

course materials, evaluations, and organizational charges. These documents were examined to compare the programs reported to what actually occurred (Patton, 1990). Given that the purpose of this study was to understand the negotiation strategies employed by adult educators on the level of practical consciousness, these two techniques were well suited because they involved inductive analysis and category building from the raw data of interviews and documents.

An important potential limitation of this study was that the researcher had been employed as a Director of Adult Education with a sister division of the Warde Financial Corporation through the data collection period of this study. To this end, the researcher may have unintentionally influenced some of the subject's responses to the interview questions. In addition, and because of the researcher's extensive knowledge of the corporate culture of the Warde Financial Corporation, the researcher might have also arrived at incorrect inferences about negotiation strategies.

This same potential limitation could also have been viewed as a significant research strength. This is so because the researcher had a high amount of internal credibility within the Warde Financial Corporation, credibility that may have helped to elicit more honest and potentially more accurate descriptions of negotiation strategies employed in practice. In addition, the Warde Corporation possessed a very strong cultural identity (an identity that was mostly derived from the Warde Chairman) that spanned all of the businesses. This broad identity could, perhaps, best be described as a "meta-culture." As such, and because of the researcher's deep familiarity with this meta-culture (norms, language, history, symbols, etc.), valuable time was not lost during the interview process describing elements of this culture, and hence the information and analysis went much deeper than would have been the case with a researcher from outside of the organization.

Findings

While Yang's "discursive" strategies were evident, the chief finding was that the "practical" strategic action of negotiation varied according to the specific situation. The planners' tactics for negotiating power and interests reflected the following phenomenon: 1) the tactics employed depended on the planners' perceptions of the stakeholders in terms of how much power the stakeholder could exercise in the situation; 2) the planners' perceptions of stakeholder power were arrayable into five separate categories along a continuum of desired stakeholder involvement (i.e., planners' perception of various stakeholder involvement ranged from "not involved" with the program on one end of the continuum to "very involved" in the program planning process on the other end); 3) the specific tactics (of which seventeen were evident in this study), then, varied according to which category the planners perceived the stakeholders to represent (see Figure 1).

In other words, the specific negotiation tactics that the planners employed depended upon what sort of involvement they wanted from each stakeholder. For example, if the planner wanted little involvement from the stakeholder (perhaps because this stakeholder could have slowed them down or possibly have hurt their efforts), their tactics might have included some form of circumvention. On the other hand (and on the other end of the stakeholder involvement spectrum), if the planner wanted the stakeholder to become personally involved in the program (perhaps as a subject matter expert), then the tactics employed might have included a direct appeal to the stakeholders' ego. The tactics employed, then (almost all at a practical level of consciousness) were done so to elicit certain behaviors from various stakeholders involved in the planning process.

In addition, the planners in this study manifested their own power by both maintaining as well as by transforming relationships of power through employing both substantive as well as meta-negotiations (Cervero & Wilson, 1998; Elgstrom & Riis, 1992; Umble, 1998). In almost every case, the planners had strongly held notions of not only what needed to be done, but also how it should be done.

They then used these tactical strategies (as outlined in Figure 1) to negotiate power and interests – practically, not discursively – among the key stakeholders in their organizations to accomplish their objectives by either maintaining or transforming relationships of power. Indeed, these substantive and meta-negotiations strategies were often used simultaneously. Cervero and Wilson (1998) write about these phenomena:

> Thus, substantive and meta-negotiations are simultaneously interwoven in daily practice…Using the metaphor of the planning table, we have shown how adult educators are always simultaneously negotiating about the important features of educational programs (substantive negotiations) and about the political relationship of those who are included and excluded from such negotiations (meta-negotiations). (p. 20)

In other words, the planners employed both substantive as well as meta-negotiations strategies to, essentially, alter the relationships of power to make it more productive for them.

Essentially, placing someone in the "low involvement" category was akin to either keeping them in the dark altogether, or at least ensuring that the stakeholder had the least level of participation as possible. Stakeholders

Figure 1. Key Findings from Interviews with Program Planners

Stake-holder is:			
Very Involved	**High Personal Involvement** Stakeholder is personally involved (i.e., time, expertise, etc.	**N & I Tactics:**	• Appealing to egos and subject matter expertise • Engaging in some sort of exchange or horsetrading • Applying subtle pressure – a.k.a. "the velvet hammer"
	Mobilizing Resources Stakeholder mobilizes resources including people, $, time, etc.	**N & I Tactics:**	• Employing a "one-down" strategy • Making the business case for a program idea • Pushing stakeholders' "hot buttons"
Moderately Involved	**Buy-In** Stakeholder understands program and buys-in	**N & I Tactics:**	• Consulting with and seeking critical feedback • Making the "buy-in" process more convenient by walking people through the program • Proactively seeking out and sharing positive feedback • Employing a "one-up" strategy
	General Program Awareness Stakeholder is aware of program and is hearing good things about it	**N & I Tactics:**	• Forming committees to "evangelize" to their peers • Using organizational communication vehicles to publicize the program • Getting to "mass" by running a successful pilot program
Not Involved	**Low Involvement** Stakeholder is not aware of what is going on / is not rendering any harm to program	**N & I Tactics:**	• Flying "under the radar screen" such that actions aren't visible • Sharing the smallest amount of information possible & designing alone • Setting the situation up for success by narrowing the universe of options • Avoiding people – "apologize later vs. ask for permission"

** "N & I" tactics indicates negotiation and influence tactics

in this category were often ones who possessed enough power to potentially hurt the program planning efforts. Indeed, a surprising number of the planner's managers fell into this category. Their tactics included: "flying under the radar screen" or keeping a low program profile to avoid unwanted attention, sharing the smallest amount of information (i.e., not sharing all of the "hairy details") possible and designing alone or with as few people as possible, setting the situation up for success, and by avoiding people and "apologizing later versus asking for permission." Given that the planners in this category did not seek to alter the fundamental relationships of power (meta-negotiations), their negotiations tactics were more substantive in nature.

Moving along the involvement axis, "general program awareness" was where the planner wanted the stakeholder to be aware of the program and to hear good things about it. The only level of involvement that the stakeholders in the general program awareness category needed was to be generally aware, in a positive way, about the program. Good program public relations seemed to be a key success factor for many of the programs. Thus, it was important to many of the planners that the "word on the street" be positive. When planners wanted stakeholders to be generally aware in a positive way about the program (general program awareness), their tactics included: forming committees to "evangelize" to their peers in their respective departments (meta-negotiations), using organizational communication and marketing tools (substantive negotiations), and "getting to mass" by running a successful pilot program which generated enthusiasm in the organization (substantive negotiations).

Stakeholders in the "buy-in" category were expected to be moderately involved with the program. This moderate involvement included understanding the program, and buying in to its objectives. Understanding and buy-in were key factors in ensuring that these stakeholders could speak to the merits of the program if they needed to, as well as could defend any specific programming actions. Again, many of the managers of the planners fell into this category. These managers were often not involved with the programs on a daily basis, but needed to be aware of them if the situation called for them to explain why certain programming decisions were made. "Buy-in" category stakeholder involvement included the following tactics: consulting with and seeking critical feedback from key stakeholders (substantive negotiations), making the buy-in process more convenient by walking people through the program (substantive negotiations), proactively seeking out and sharing positive feedback (meta-negotiations), and employing a "one-up" strategy where planners had more powerful people in the organization marshal support from people who were even more powerful than them (meta-negotiations).

The "mobilizing resources" category included the stakeholder mobilizing resources for the program such as money, people, time, etc. This was a much more significant level of involvement on the part of key stakeholder. As such, the negotiation tactics intensified. When planners wanted the stakeholders to mobilize significant resources for their programs in this category, the tactics included: employing a "one-down" strategy in which high level people influenced lower level people to mobilize resources (meta-negotiations), and through making the "business case" for a program idea (ideas which the planners had, more often than not, intuitively arrived at but they needed to validate for key stakeholders) through providing data, anecdotes, stories, etc., (substantive negotiations), and by understanding and pushing stakeholders "hot buttons" (meta-negotiations).

The "high personal involvement" category constituted the most intense level of personal involvement on the part of the stakeholder. As a result, all of the negotiations strategies sought to transform relationships of power through meta-negotiations. Stakeholders in this category were expected to get personally involved in the program through expending their own time or expertise. For example, high personal involvement stakeholders often helped develop key content modules for programs and often facilitated these modules. Key tactics employed to generate this level of program involvement included: appealing to their egos / subject matter expertise, engaging in some form of exchange or horsetrading and articulating the W.I.F.M. (what's in this for me) for each stakeholder, and by applying subtle pressure (a.k.a. "the velvet hammer").

Implications for Future Research

Perhaps the most pressing implication for future research centers around the ethics of program planning. When planners are faced with multiple and often conflicting interests, whose needs should they serve? Clearly, the organizations for which they work will almost always demand that the needs of those with the most power be served first. In response to this question, Cervero and Wilson (1994 & 1996) advocate that planners should employ a substantively democratic planning process in which the needs of all affected stakeholders should be considered. In reality, however, how do planners make those difficult decisions in the politically intricate settings in which they work?

A second and major implication for future research has to do with the replicability of this study in other kinds of organizations. These negotiation tactics were effective within the context of the Warde Financial

Corporations - a large, mature, financial services corporation with a very deeply embedded set of corporate norms. However, it is unknown whether or not they would be effective within a smaller manufacturing firm or a high-tech firm, to name just a few examples.

A third implication for future research centers around the use of covert practices within organizations. Since this study reflected the use of a number of covert practices (flying under the radar screen, avoiding people, getting more powerful stakeholders to appeal to less powerful ones), it would be interesting to explore the theory and the practice behind the use of covert practices in organizations so to make connections with adult education program planning practices.

Contributions to New Knowledge in HRD

As has been well documented, the scope and impact of adult education activities upon individuals and upon the communities in which they live is both wide and deep. However, adult educators in their roles as HRD practitioners, as a whole, continue to occupy a somewhat marginalized place in the organizations in which they do their work in that they typically do not possess large quantities of organizational power. With the exception of educational institutions, most adult education activity occurs on the periphery of organizations and is typically not the central product or focus of these organizations. As such, adult educators walk a precarious line as they attempt to do high quality work that is not only desirable and acceptable to the organizations which pay their salaries, but is congruent with their personal values and visions of "what could be" as well. Indeed, the tension created in the attempt to reconcile these factors constitutes a key dilemma for most adult educators.

A potentially key contribution of this research to new knowledge in HRD, then, is that it suggests a number of specific tactics which planners and HRD practitioners can employ to, essentially, reconstruct these relationships of power so that they can be more effective in planning educational programs in their respective organizations. In doing so, this study affirms Isaac's (1987 & 1992) definition of power as "the capacities to act possessed by social agents by virtue of the enduring relations in which they participate" (1992, p. 27). As such, the planners in this study used their "powers to act" to reconstruct existing power relationships through both substantive and meta-negotiations to make their respective planning situations more productive for them.

Adult educators and HRD practitioners often vie for seats at what Cervero and Wilson (1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1997) refer to as the metaphorical as well as literal organizational "planning table" – a table from which they are often distanced due to their lack of relative organizational power. The potentiality, then, for adult educators and HRD practitioners to replicate some of these tactics so to reconstruct power relationships is tantalizing indeed. Indeed, adult educators might not only find that their seats at this metaphorical planning table are more powerful and productive ones, but they also may find that these more powerful seats allow them the space and the leverage to do the kinds of work that is most congruent with their own personal values.

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Understanding the Experience of College Graduates during Their First Year of Employment

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Understanding the experience of graduates during their first year of employment improves college recruitment practices, as well as organizational socialization processes. This study recorded the experiences of eight college graduates, who were employed by a major manufacturer headquartered in the Midwest. Two unstructured interviews were conducted with each participant to gain insight and understanding of their first year experience. Nine themes were identified and are discussed. Recommendations are offered and research implications are discussed.

Key words: College graduates, First year of employment, Organizational socialization

The transition from college to first job after graduation is significant. The literature is ripe with strategies and tips for assisting college graduates in landing their first perfect job. Further, studies have been done describing the challenges organizations face in attracting and hiring college graduates, and graduates' expectations for their first employer (Bewayo, 1990; Corley, 1999; Losyk, 1997; Montana & Leneghan, 1999). Authors have also articulated strategies to assist students, and their new organization, in better managing the transition by offering ways to ease the transition for both (Asher, 1999; Holton, 1999). The literature is far more limited, however, in describing the work experience once graduates have actually begun working. While some have surveyed graduates on the socialization process they experienced becoming familiar with their new employer during their first year of employment (Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Holton, 1995; Nicholson & Arnold, 1991; Richards, 1984), few have captured the feelings, frustrations, and challenges of the experiences from the individual's perspective.

What is the first job experience like for them? What do these young people feel during their first year of employment? What challenges do they encounter in adapting to not only their selected organization, but in many cases their new city and their new home? How do they make friends when they have moved to a new community where they know virtually no one? My research explored these questions.

Significance to HRD

Understanding the first year experience of college graduates is critical to the organizations hiring them. Human resources managers can gain insight into their perspectives of reality versus expectations that may have been discussed during the recruiting process. Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals need to understand this group of employees in order to provide them with the development and coaching needed to be successful in their selected organizations, both immediately and over their longer term employment. Additionally, a study that examines the experiences of newly hired college graduate offers potential insights to the company's process for orienting new employees to its culture, norms and practices. Holton (1995) called this process "organizational entry" and suggested that its responsibility rests clearly with HRD. While the results of this study cannot be generalized or transferred to another organization, understanding the experience of this particular group of first year college graduates provides valuable knowledge and perspective about the organizational entry. This knowledge provides opportunities for improving or modifying practices within the organization around college recruiting, onboarding orientation, and employee development.

College Graduates and the First Year Work Experience

This research adds to what others have already discovered about the first year work experience. Rayer (1998) articulated the difficulty new graduates faced in adjusting to their new role of employee and their frustration in learning the underlying cultural norms and unwritten rules of their new organization. Holton (1995) found that while the first year experience was positive and productive for some graduates in their first jobs, it was difficult,

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stressful and less successful than desired for others. Gardner and Lambert (1993) reported a considerable difference between their pre-work expectations and the experiences on the job, being less challenged, using few skills, having less autonomy, and receiving less feedback than expected. Others conducting similar studies include Richards (1984) and Nicholson and Arnold (1991). To add further understanding to this area, the following question was pursued: What is it like working in a large corporate environment as your first job following college graduation?

Method

Individuals participating in my study were working in software engineering jobs, performing tasks such as requirements definition, software design, and testing for new products or enhancements on existing products. They all worked within a single division of a large manufacturer headquartered in the Midwest. All had been employed with the company for roughly eight to ten months when I first interviewed them. They were hired directly from college and ranged in age from 22 to 25 years old. Using a structured interview guide, eight individuals were interviewed. The interview began by asking each individual why they had selected their organization, and then they were asked to describe their experience.

Each interview was transcribed, read and reread to identify key ideas about their experiences. Individual key ideas were compared to identify themes that were central or common to the overall experience. Each theme was named and described. Nine themes emerged. Once each theme had been named and fully described, the researcher returned to the participants to review them. During the second interview, participants provided additional perspective, correction and further insight into the experience. Many were surprised that, while they had not necessarily articulated one aspect (one identified theme) of the experience during their own interview, it was indeed part of their first year experience. The nine themes identified are grouped into three major categories: work environment, friendship, and performance.

Findings--Work Environment

Un-stressful and Easy-going Work Environment

Participants described a work environment that they enjoyed and found very comfortable. It is easy-going and unstructured. They were expecting to work with highly stressed people and being stressed themselves, working under tight deadlines, and being carefully monitored and managed by someone else, most likely their supervisor. They were relieved to discover that none of these characteristics were true about their work environment or the company they had joined. Participants described the reasonableness of the environment. "You have a good pace, good expectations here. You actually have deadlines, but nobody's pounding us over the head because we need to get things done, at least not in my group." This was a surprise to them. They had expected work to be highly controlled, being required to punch a clock or being watched constantly, particularly about the hours they worked; they didn't expect to be able to set their own work schedules or go rollerblading during lunchtime.

The Literature Perspective on Easy-going Work Environment. Raines (1997) devoted an entire chapter to describing Generation X's preferred work environment--their desire to work in a flexible, low stress environment. The environment that the participants in this study work in fit all her criteria: casual and friendly, clean and orderly, up-to-date technology, collegial, a place to learn, high level of freedom, and functional. Losyk (1997) and Montana and Leneghan (1999), who have also queried Generation Xers on expectations of their employers, have concluded that they prefer a work environment that offers a great deal of freedom to work with minimal supervision. Losyk added, however, that while graduates are fearful of being micro-managed, they want guidelines and access to management should they have questions or need direction.

Frustration with Much to Learn and No Structure to Follow

Participants discovered that there was a lot to learn in their new job and about their new company. This particular organization does not offer a formal training program for its college graduates, but rather urges them to learn through informal means about the business, its products and industry, and the tools they will be using to do their job. This learning is very unstructured, and lasts roughly three months. Participants were encouraged to ask questions of longer term employees, read old textbooks, attend a myriad of classes offered by the organization, and "play" with the technology to discover how it works. Very little structure was provided during this initial learning period, and minimal work was expected to be produced. The unstructured environment, where there was a great to

deal learn about how things were done, and yet very little formal guidance was given about how to navigate through it was both surprising and unsettling to the participants I interviewed. They were surprised that a company as large as theirs did not have a structured way to show new graduates how and where to focus their efforts. Their frustration in the maze of information was further confounded in other areas, as well. From their perspective, the company gave them little guidance in navigating through non-work related tasks, such as finding apartments, working through benefit options, or finding how to participate in the company's intramural golf league. Yet, while this was frustrating, they expressed a great deal of satisfaction once they had navigated through yet another unknown challenge.

The Literature Perspective on Learning Work and Non-work Related Practices. While participants generally enjoyed the unstructured work environment, they found the lack of structure difficult when they needed to learn how to do something or gain organizational information. The process of adapting to the new organization is referred to in the literature as organizational socialization, the process by which individuals acquire the tasks, social knowledge, and behaviors needed to successfully participate as a member of their new organization (van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Related research supports Generation X's preference for a highly unstructured, flexible work environments (Losyk, 1997; Montana & Leneghan, 1999; Raines, 1997), yet, the unstructured environment under which my participants were initially socialized caused frustration, stress, and confusion. Asher (1999) provided some explanation for this paradox by highlighting the differences between the limited structure in many corporate settings with the highly structured learning environment of colleges that use syllabus-driven learning outcomes and concrete measures derived from term papers and exams. The dramatic contrast of the two environments shows how easily new graduates can feel confused or off track in their new work environment.

Findings—Friendship

Different Than School To Make Friends

Participants described spending a lot of time getting to know people. Their actions were deliberate and focused, enabling them to meet friends. They observed very quickly that people interacted differently at work than they had at school. "Everybody kind of stays in their cube and does their thing, " said one individual. "It's really tough to describe because it's not really overt, [there isn't] a lot of chatting and going back and forth," said another. Participants described their surprise and even sadness at realizing how much younger they were than most of their co-workers, "at first, it seemed like everybody was twice as old as me." When I asked why this mattered, one explained simply, "You just like to hang out with people like you." Despite the reality of a different social environment, participants described taking a proactive and productive manner for learning to fit in and establishing friendships. Friendships happened; they discovered, through a series of informal, unplanned events.

The Literature Perspective on the Difference in Making Friends in the Workplace. "The workplace is an important locus of friendship formation," asserted Fehr (1996, p. 46). Work tasks often require friendly cooperation and collaboration, and the physical proximity of co-workers in cubicles allows for frequent interchange of ideas that are work related, and non-work related, and similarity of backgrounds and work departments all promote workplace friendship formation. Further, friendships, she stated, are more likely to occur from one's own personal network, being introduced to a friend of a friend. So it is not uncommon, as the participants in this study described, for acquaintances that are introduced in the work setting to introduce work friends to other members of their social network. Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) interviewed 180 undergraduate and recently employed graduates, who were single, married with no children, or married with children on the social provision friends, partners or parents provided. Social provisions included such things as companionship, intimate disclosure, affection, nurturance, emotional support, and guidance. "Subjects in the single phase reported friends as the single most frequent providers of companionship and intimate disclosure," (p. 401) they found. As new workers, they have left their college relationships behind; for this group of participants, they left their friends literally behind in other cities, and must now build their new support structure and network primarily through their contacts at work.

Friendship is Critical to Feeling Settled and Belonging

Participants described friendship and friendship making as a key component of their first year experience. They described actively seeking others out, and inviting new comers into their group of friends to help others in the settling process. Friendship is critical to this group. They talked about it a great deal during both interviews. When

asked why friendship was so critical, one individual responded, "It provides a sense of belonging, for one thing. Fun. Lack of boredom. With friends you experience new things, experience things in life. You share things with your friends." Many talked about friendship making as a journey. All deeply rely on their friends for support, encouragement, and companionship. I asked one individual what the friendship support structure provided. He said, "It's a sounding board, pretty much. Work related, life related. Have people to share your experiences with and gain commonality. You understand each other and that allows you the opportunity to help other people. So I think that it's kind of give and take."

The Literature Perspective on Friends and Belonging. Several research studies support this theme of friendship and the belonging it brings to young adults. Rose (1985), for example, interviewed 90 undergraduates and recently hired graduates, asking them what their friends do for and with one another. She discovered eight functions of their friendships: acceptance, help, loyalty, availability, recognition, intimacy, and companionship. Additionally, she discovered nine methods for formation and maintenance of friendships: physical proximity, demonstration of concern, willingness to make sacrifices, length of contact, sharing of ideas, commonality of interests, initiation of affection, sexual interests, and unwillingness to form friendships. Clearly, friendships are critically important to young adults. The Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) study referred to earlier, supports this need as well. They found that the reliance on friends to satisfy social needs is greatest during the single phase in early adulthood, and is reduced significantly during marital and parenthood stages that occur later in life. They reported, "subjects in the single phase reported friends as the single most frequent providers of companionship and intimate disclosure.," (p. 401).

Moved to Find a Better Sense of Belonging

Nearly all participants moved during their first year. They moved to a place they described as being better for them. They moved to be in a neighborhood or area that housed more people like themselves. They liked the action in a particularly younger part of the metropolitan area: it was diverse, close to everything, and attracts people like themselves. Moving lead to them feeling even more connected to their new city. They expressed frustration that the company provided no insights into where college graduates might prefer living, and which communities to avoid. This researcher was unable to uncover research studies related to this theme. However, perhaps it isn't as significant as those of us who have been settled in one place for years may question. Said one, when I asked why everyone moved, "We just move. In college we lived somewhere different every year. So if we don't like where we're living, we just find somewhere else."

Findings—Performance

Unsure of Own Performance Due to Lack of Feedback

The first theme in the performance area is the uncertainty the participants they felt because they received little structured feedback from their immediate supervisor. Receiving frequent, job-relevant feedback was a clear expectation of the college graduates I interviewed. Said one, "My year one is coming up, but you know, not once has my manager said one thing to me about my performance, negative or positive." Participants in my study had high expectations for receiving frequent and ongoing feedback from their boss. They easily described why they had this expectation– well-established feedback systems were followed in every class in college and in high school. One individual articulated the experience, "in school, you receive frequent and immediate feedback. You are assigned homework and receive a grade. You take a test and receive a score. Grades provide a periodic measure of how you are progressing on a topic. This is true for both high school and college." Not all individuals reported a lack of feedback. A few of the participants described their experience as just the opposite. They received focused, specific feedback and frequent interaction with their manager. Said one, "Everybody has been really helpful in helping me come up with my goals, helping me gain understanding in what it is that I want to do." They knew where their performance was satisfactory, and they knew where they should concentrate their efforts.

The Literature Perspective on Feedback Expectations. Many who have conducted studies on the first year experience following college graduation have not specifically reported the need for frequent, job-specific manager feedback (Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Holton, 1995; Montana & Lenaghan, 1999; Nicholson & Arnold, 1991). These studies focused on the degree of employee satisfaction or organizational commitment that occurred during the graduate's first year of employment. Others, however, have identified this need. Rayer (1998), for example,

reported the experience of seven college graduates during their first three month of employment following graduation by asking them to record their work experience through daily journaling. Her participants reported a similar frustration and sense of uncertainty because they did not receive regular feedback from their supervisor. Additionally, Holton and Russell (1999) reported a strong predictor between the graduate's experience in institutional preparation, informal training, introduction to other people in the organization, and their initial feedback seeking behavior to the attachment they felt with their organization one year after beginning employment.

Guilt of not Producing

The division within which I interviewed hires 20 to 25 undergraduates a year. When hired, new graduates are generally knowledgeable about the division in which they will be working, but not about their specific job responsibilities. The company does not offer a structured training program. Rather, it expects new hire graduates to spend their first few months learning--getting acquainted with company's processes, procedures and products, learning the software and hardware environment, and discovering about particular projects that are underway. This approach offers freedom and flexibility. Individuals in my study chose this company over others that offered more highly structured new graduate training programs, such as the Big Five consulting firms, or regimented rotational programs. While they knew their initial learning would be informal, they found it confusing and unsettling. Many participants described their first few months of employment as slow, and they spent a lot of time learning. This felt uncomfortable. While they knew they would not be entering into a structured training program, they were surprised that there was virtually no structure to guide their learning. Said one, "What did I do every day? Try to figure out what I was supposed to do which I found out was nothing. It's sort of weird, you know"

The Literature Perspective on not Being Productive. This theme is difficult to find in the literature. In the studies noted earlier on college graduates during their first year of work (Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Holton, 1995; Holton & Russell, 1999; Montana & Lenaghan, 1999; Nicholson & Arnold, 1991; Rayer, 1998), this particular theme is not identified. Other literature, however, hints at this theme. Holton (1999) wrote an article intended to assist new graduates settle into their new organization quickly. He urged new graduates to focus first year goals on more than just productivity. He asserted that while productivity goals are important and reasonable, knowledge and skill development must also be one's focus. Graduates must also spend time learning to fit in and gaining acceptance and respect from co-workers, he suggested.

Gratification Finally to Contribute

All participants described eventually moving from the learning mode to actually producing the work they thought they were hired to produce. It happened gradually. Most described getting to a certain point in the year where the pieces that they had been learning and the few work tasks they had been given to do started to make sense. Two key feelings were expressed: relief to finally be doing something meaningful, and elation with the results they had produced. Many said it took several months to get to a point where they felt they finally had contributed something meaningful to their organization. Participants described satisfaction and personal reassurance that they would actually be working, not just reading materials during their tenure with the company. Said one individual, "after six months, I started to really accomplish some things that I can be proud of and I feel like I've come a long way in that year.... I'm starting to earn that paycheck." Some described it coming, not all at once, but gradually over time. I was unable to find any published research or anecdotes related to this theme of college graduate's need to contribute during their first year.

Personal Satisfaction and Growth in the Overall Experience

The final theme sums up the year's experience: it has been positive, productive, and participants have grown a great deal during the year. "I've actually liked it more than I thought I would," said one individual. "I'm liking it more though as I stay with it," said yet another. During the year they discovered the world of work. Said one, "I've learned what it's like to make a living." However, many described the work as not being as challenging as they had expected. Participants described a great deal of satisfaction with themselves during the year. They were surprised at how enjoyable and satisfying their accomplishments were. They described growing a great deal during the year: managing their own apartment and finances, moving to a new city, contributing and being sought out for advise, gaining insights into what its like to work day-to-day. One individual summed it up as follows, "Overall, [the year] has opened my eyes to what the real world is, as well as giving me a chance to contribute."

The Literature Perspective on First Year Satisfaction. This theme, satisfaction in the overall experience, has been researched in a number of studies looking at college graduates during their first year of employment. Holton (1995) surveyed 378 college graduates during their first year of employment, and found a wide range of relative satisfaction with the overall experience in many college graduates. He reported a mean of 4.05 (on a scale of 5) suggesting that many participants experienced a highly satisfying experience. He pointed out, however, that the standard deviation in the sample of .71 suggested that many respondents had unsatisfying experiences, as well.

Discussion

This study offers a number of insights into the college graduates' experience. While the results are not generalizable to any population, they offer awareness to those who work with and employ college graduates. Some of the insights I gained from the research are discussed below.

I entered this study thinking I had a good understanding of their first year experience, my research revealed that there are many aspects of their experience with which I was unaware. For example, I had never realized the criticality of friendships during this period in their lives, nor did I realize that the source of their friendships came primarily from their workplace. I overlooked this aspect, perhaps, because I married immediately after graduation and had a different perspective about workforce friendships than the mostly single graduates that I interviewed. (See Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) for related research.)

I was also struck by their struggle to figure things out and for sources of reliable information in their new organization. The individuals in my study were bright, articulate, and academically accomplished. Generation X literature cited in this study (Hornblower, 1997; Losyk, 1997; Macalister, 1994) clearly stated that young adults demand freedom and flexibility and reject a good deal of structure. Yet, when the organization provided them with just that, they were frustrated, confused, and surprised that a company as large and as successful as theirs did not offer a more formal socialization process.

In reflecting on the experience of conducting this study, I am very satisfied with the methodology I selected for this study. Like many United States' academicians, I was educated to appreciate quantitative research approaches. The hermeneutic phenomenology approach I used did not reveal statistics or trends, but, rather, it allowed me to hear, perhaps for the first time, the stories and the experiences that occurred beyond the statistics and the quantitative studies that have been reported in the past. The results produced two new themes--guilt at not producing and moving to find a better sense of belonging—themes that I was unable to find previously documented in studies relating to college graduates. Additionally, my study yielded insights and depth of the experience that were not necessarily captured in other college graduate studies. For these reasons, I have concluded that there is a necessity for using both quantitative and qualitative research to understand more fully an organizational issue, an issue such as the first year experience following graduation.

The themes in this study were described earlier. While each stands on its own, when they are looked at in total, they offer additional perspective in describing the first year experience. Three cross-theme reflections are offered: (a) Many (Asher, 1999; Gardner & Lambert, 1993; Holton, 1995; Nicholson & Arnold, 1991; Rayer, 1998) have described the transition from college to work as significant. Yet, speaking with individuals from my study, they don't describe it as significant. Rather they see their first job as the next step in their life's journey. The year was full of transition: many were living in a new community, all held their first fulltime, long term job, all were developing new friendships, and were adjusting to the reality of spending most of their day working, rather than doing other activities they enjoyed. (b) The most significant insight for this researcher was the criticality of friendships. As I was reading and rereading the transcripts, I was struck how often they talked about the social environment, making friends, and how different work life was from school life. They weren't describing these discoveries as necessarily bad, just different. When I tried to understand this more fully, participants frequently described the highly social environment of campus life. The Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) study on friendship making in young adulthood affirmed the participants' need and desire for friendships at this point in their lives. "Friendships reach their peak of functional significance in the network during the single phase of young adulthood" (p. 405). (c) The organization's willingness to give new hires a long time to "learn the ropes" has business merit. It gives new graduates time to adjust and conform to organizational practices before being relied on to deliver to deadlines on critical projects. Yet, it was clear that graduates were uncomfortable with the non-producing phase of their employment. They came to the organization ready to design requirements, code programs and test features. They did not expect to spend their first few months learning about a myriad of seemingly unrelated topics, particularly when the learning followed little or no structure.

Recommendations

This study provides a number of possible recommendations to the organization that employs the participants in this study. It also offers a perspective for soon-to-be college graduates to consider. It also identifies opportunities for further research.

Recommendations to the Organization

As the individuals whom I interviewed were not statistically selected, results from this study cannot be generalized to any group. However, the insights gained from this study should be carefully considered by the organization that employs the participants. The organization may benefit by examining these findings in conjunction with insights gained through other means, such as exit interviews or employee opinion surveys, to determine whether the recommendations offered below are plausible. I suggest the following: (a) *Establish peer mentors.* The organization currently assigns an experienced engineer to every new graduate engineer. This practice is not uncommon, and mentors tend to focus on career development issues. Graduates during their first few months of employment, however, tend to focus less on long-term career development issues and more on not making themselves look foolish and just figuring things out. (b) *Facilitate friendship making.* Those I interviewed expressed frustration that the organization spends a great deal of effort courting interns, their future new graduates, but does nothing to connect new hires to each other once they become fulltime employees. Assistance in friendship making could be inexpensive and could be managed by former graduates themselves, a picnic or dinner in the middle of the summer could not only facilitate young people meeting each other, but it could also reinforce to new hires that they had selected the right organization. (c) *Provide a learning framework.* Participants were not looking for a great deal of learning structure; many said they were simply looking for a picture of how things fit together. A first year learning framework could be a simple list posted on the company's intranet identifying learning outcomes at various points throughout the year, or it could be a packet of electronic information that provides reference information in a number of areas. It should include areas of focus during the first month, three months, six months, and year and identify learning outcomes for each timeframe. Additionally, the framework could include contact information and reference points for professional affiliations, as well as non-work related information. (d) *Engage college new hires.* Organizational members, not just an employee's manager, would be well advised to be aware of new graduates and assist them in little ways with their transition. Simple interest and conversation can help them with their transition.

Recommendations to Future Graduates

This study also provides information about the first job experience that may be helpful to future graduates. For example, this study points to the fact that there is a great deal to learn in a new organization, and much of what needs to be learned is not written down. This is very different from college, where every step in the learning process is clearly laid out. Additionally, the study discussed that the composition of the workplace is very different from the environments to which college students are accustomed. Participants in this study came to realize that not all employees wanted to be friends. Finally, many participants discussed the lack of feedback they received. Graduates so often focus their job search on impressing potential employers. After conducting this study, I would encourage soon-to-be graduates to continue to focus their job searches, but also to interview friends who are now full-time employees to discover their experiences.

Opportunities for Further Research

This study invites additional research. Any of the nine themes could be researched more fully. For example, research could be explored on the friendship themes to determine whether they are consistent in many college graduates or unique to the eight I interviewed. Additionally, data could be collected from the participants' managers to ascertain whether they believe they are providing their new hires with adequate feedback. Research could also be conducted on the themes that offered little if any related research. While all of these research possibilities are compelling, I suggest pursuing the same study in another organization, an organization that has a strong, yet different culture. Partnering with an organization that employs highly standardized training programs and predictable work progression, such as a large consulting firm or even the U. S. Marine Corps, might provide contrast to the themes that emerged from this particular study

Summary

This article reviewed the study I conducted on understanding the experience of college graduates during their first year of employment. It articulated the research method I followed and provided a brief review of the nine themes that were discovered. It discussed a number of insights I gained from the research. These insights included personal reflections from the researcher, perspectives on the value of qualitative research as they relate to the first year employment experience, and consideration of the cross-theme perspectives on the entirety of the first year work experience. I then discussed recommendations to the organization that hired the participants in my study, and recommendations to future graduates. Finally, I concluded the paper by describing opportunities for future research.

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